

# **Character & Urban Design**



## Eastern Gateway / 7 Corners Planning Opportunity Area 5



# Character & Urban Design

### Overview

This section provides urban design recommendations to create an inviting, pedestrian-scale environment; reconnect residents and visitors with the natural environment; and celebrate the East End as a distinct destination with a unique culture.

A goal of this plan is making the East End a unique and attractive destination that people will want to explore by any mode of transportation. To achieve this goal, the design of the area will have to be reshaped and resized to a scale that is comfortable for people to enjoy. This means creating pedestrian-scale street and developments that prioritize smaller walkable blocks, narrower streets, ample walking room, engaging streetscapes, and welcoming ground floor building facades.

Another goal is reconnecting East End residents and visitors to the natural environment; reversing the highly impermeable site through introduction of a street tree canopy, and the creation of park spaces.

Finally, the East End should be recognized and celebrated as a distinctive destination within Falls Church with unique culture. Inclusion of flexible event space, wayfinding, and gateway elements will help to shape the area's identity.

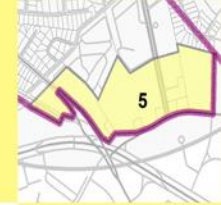


*Friends enjoying lunch in colorful seating under the shade of street trees.*





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### Streetscape

An impactful way to begin transforming a place is to begin with improving streetscape. The plan's goal is to make the East End become an attractive, vibrant, and unique destination, and streetscape can help contribute to the area's sense of place. Wider sidewalks can house the outdoor dining, seating, lamps, bike racks, and other amenities that are important to creating a comfortable space that encourages visitors and residents to walk, gather, linger, and explore.

In addition to allocation of space for people and man-made amenities, increasing the amount of natural landscape and canopy coverage through ground level plantings and street trees is a major improvement goal of this plan.

The following are recommendations to create a successful and vibrant East End streetscape.

**Strategy:** In accordance with the City's adopted Streetscape Design Standards for Commercial Streets, ensure public infrastructure projects, infill development, and building retrofits along Broad Street includes a full set of streetscape amenities, including trees, benches, wide sidewalks, etc.

**Strategy:** Existing and new streets should more densely plant street trees to increase canopy coverage, and provide shade. Trees should also be incorporated in any parks or plazas. Where there is not sufficient space for a tree, smaller colorful or green vegetation should be planted.

**Strategy:** Incorporate a variety of street furniture such as benches along the sidewalks, moveable seating in plazas and

parks, stairs, as well as consciously designing planter edges and public art at a sitting height.

**Strategy:** Provide adequate lighting throughout the East End to increase sense of security and liveliness at night. Lighting can come in various forms, however, should be designed at the pedestrian scale as opposed to the current automotive scale.



*Shady street with inviting ground floor retail and outdoor dining.*



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### Block Size

Typically, a person is willing to walk to a destination within 0.6 miles (10-12 minute walk), however the quality of that walk can drastically affect the tolerance of an individual. A major factor in determining a quality is block length. Small to moderate block sizes of 300-500' are more favorable to healthy walking environments. Larger blocks can be sustained and enjoyable to walk when they include smaller pedestrian-scaled streets, active alleyways, public spaces, and a lively ground floor.

The East End, an area approximately 40 acres, is split by the street grid into three super blocks/nodes. If a pedestrian were to walk along the East End from E Broad they would experience a 2,300 ft path which is only broken up by drive isles to parking lots before finally reaching the intersection of Roosevelt Blvd. There is no alternative path or street grid offered and there are few marked crosswalks.

These mega blocks can be broken up by creating new internal shared streets, commercial alleyways, parks, and plazas. Additions to the street grid should focus on frequent, safe pedestrian crossings between the three nodes so that a pedestrian could cross from one parcel to the other without having to walk the perimeter of the East End.

**Strategy:** Work with property owners and Fairfax County during any future redevelopment to align new streets with existing layout to create an improved street grid, smaller walkable blocks, and frequent safe crossings, all of which will enhance connectivity between the East End nodes.

**Strategy:** New development should break up buildings to create alleyways between buildings. These pathways should be treated as public spaces rather than utilitarian delivery spaces.

**Strategy:** Site designs, especially for larger sites, should include interior passages to avoid creating “superblocks”.

**Strategy:** With the creation of a new street grid, recommend block lengths to be a maximum of 400 feet long. If larger are create they should include pedestrian streets and public space.

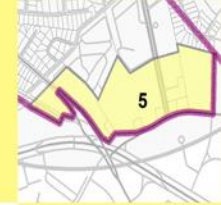


*Evidence that block size alone does not make an area feel walkable. Downtown Lubbock Texas (above and below) has 320 ft block lengths yet distances feel exaggerated by lack of any kind of pedestrian engagement.*





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### Building Height to Street Width Ratio

The height of a street's buildings in relation to the width of the street is important for creating a sense of enclosure, while also avoiding a sense of being in a canyon. When lined with low height and far setback buildings a road begins to feel like a highway. Narrower streets create more of an intimate space with slower speeds allowing the street to be comfortably shared by all modes of transportation.

Wilson Boulevard has 5 lanes of traffic and varies from 60-70 feet when including its long merge lane near the intersection of Route 7. Lined with one story commercial, low lined street trees, undersized sidewalks, and setbacks ranging from 80-500+ feet, Wilson feels wide and empty. While not as dramatic, the same characteristics are felt along East Broad St and Roosevelt Blvd.

There is no precise ratio and a ratio should not preclude a particular building height but there should be consideration in how the ratio impacts the feel of an area. Wider roadways lead to faster roads designed to quickly push cars from one point to another.

**Strategy:** Narrow Wilson Blvd, by removing one lane in each direction, rededicating the space to cycle lanes and sidewalk.

**Strategy:** Any future redevelopment should focus on infill along major roadways to fill the setback gap, bring buildings to the sidewalk, and sized appropriately for the street width.



Top: Existing Wilson Blvd looking eastward.

Bottom: Reimagined render of Wilson Blvd narrowed to include bicycle lanes, street trees, and infill development with improved streetscape.



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### Site Design

A goal of this plan is to reengage people with the street to create a welcoming public realm. Elements of a welcoming public realm included wide spaces to allow people to walk side by side and pass, street trees, café seating, and other amenities. How far away from the sidewalk a building face is can tell you a lot about an area. A building too close to the curb leaves no room for street trees and pedestrian amenities. A building too far from the curb distances people from the building and often caters to automobile parking and mobility. In addition, no one building should dominate the block, but rather it should incorporate breaks to create interior paths and avoid impermeable mega-blocks.

**Strategy:** During redevelopment and as part of City's Capital Improvement Program (CIP) projects, apply the City's streetscape standards for building setbacks, of 20 feet, along Broad Street, Wilson Blvd, and Roosevelt Blvd. This space provides room for street trees, restaurant seating, walking space, benches bike racks, and wayfinding.

**Strategy:** Site design should discourage mega-block developments where a single building dominates a city block. Such sites should be broken up by alleys, minor streets, or through differing architectural details.

**Strategy:** Early on in site design allocate spaces for public parks, plazas, and minor streets through the block.

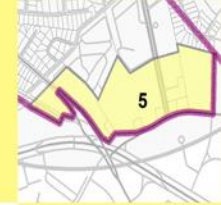


*Top: Example of a site which prioritizes low density park & shop design.  
Bottom: Example of a site which prioritizes higher density development friendly to multiple modes of transportation and room for amenities such as street trees.*





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### Architecture

Building façade, particularly the treatment of the ground floor, has significant influence to an area's character. Some of these factors include vertical design elements, transparent and welcoming ground floors, variation of the façade's depth or material, residential balconies, and active rooftops. New buildings should also incorporate biophilic design elements and strive for sustainable LEED designations.

**Strategy:** New developments should strive to offer a variety of ground floor styles by favoring design which accommodates more frequent narrow/tall units rather than wide/long units. Considering a pedestrian's pace, narrower units provide a wide variation of goods and services provide a much more intriguing streetscape which encouraging people to explore.

**Strategy:** Ground floor storefronts should be transparent, well lit, and welcoming. Restaurants are encouraged to provide outdoor seating areas as well as window seating to allow for the fullest degree of street life.

**Strategy:** Street facing balconies and active rooftops, both residential and commercial, are additional ways to keep eyes on the street to further increase safety as well as street activation.

**Strategy:** Consider top floor building setbacks along major roadways and nearing residential areas to provide visual variation and reduce the perceived height on the building from the street.

**Strategy:** New construction should utilize biophilic design elements by weakening the boundary between the inside and outside of a building. This can be accomplished through

emphasis on natural light, inclusion of water features, use of natural materials, and addition of trees and greenery in walls, roofs, and landscaping; to name a few methods.

**Strategy:** New construction should strive for a designation of LEED Gold or higher.



*Example of a biophilic storefront combining greenery, natural materials, balconies, and open walls to create an intriguing ground floor business.*



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### Gateway

The City's adopted Streetscape Standards (2017) identifies the East End as a gateway into Falls Church. Gateways provide a welcoming transition and a clear identity to the city and neighborhoods within. Gateways commonly include a mix of elements, including signs, lighting, landscaping, public art and monuments, benches or other furniture, signature architecture, and special paving. Gateways help to instill a sense of community by creating a sense of place.

The East End Gateway should announce entrance into Falls Church when traveling from Arlington and Fairfax into the City. The gateway should help to establish distinct identity that one is in Falls Church, as the area tends to blend one jurisdiction into the other currently.

**Strategy:** Incorporate branding, public art, and unique signage within the medians and architectural elements on building facades, rooftops, and building frontages to reinforce the gateway experience.

**Strategy:** Enhance landscaping and streetscape along Route 7/ Broad Street to create a gateway that complies with the Falls Church Streetscape Standards (2017).

**Strategy:** Design the gateway to be experienced and viewed from various modes of transportation (i.e. pedestrian, bicyclists, vehicles).



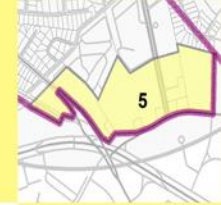
Top: Gateway Feature in Delray Beach, Florida.

Bottom: Gateway Feature into Chicago's Humboldt Park Neighborhood.





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### Wayfinding

Wayfinding signage should be incorporated into new development to further enhance placemaking. Wayfinding strategies should align with the City's wayfinding efforts to establish a distinctive identity and sense of place that connects the East End to the rest of the City. Wayfinding can be oriented for motorists such as street signs as well as pedestrians through maps, objects, buildings, and landmarks.

Wayfinding signage that incorporates the Vietnamese language should be explored in the Eden Center area. The integration of bilingual street signage in the area could aid in establishing a distinct sense of cultural identity when around the center. Bilingual street signage would also enhance inclusivity and accessibility for many in the area.

**Action:** Incorporate Vietnamese onto street signs in the Eden Center area to enhance the presence of cultural identity when travels along streets.

**Strategy:** Incorporate wayfinding signage as the area redevelops, particularly in light of an East End Town Center.



*Falls Church Wayfinding Signage*



*Bilingual Signage in New York City's Chinatown*





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### Parks and Plazas

A welcoming square provide a focal point for people to gather, celebrate and recreate. Form and function will differ, however common elements include a mixture of hardscape and vegetation, a wide variety of seating options, presence of water, opportunity for food, a sense safety, connection to the street, and a location nearby to other active areas. This plan suggests such an amenity be built for citizens of the East End. The following are examples of types of public spaces which may include in the East End.

### Squares and Plazas

Typically, larger and center focus. Large open space for a flexible programing of actives from large once a year holiday celebration, to Sunday movie showing, live local band performances, farmers markets, or morning yoga.

**Action:** Create a cultural square proximate to existing or future retail and restaurants. The area should have flexible programming, ample seating, and a mixture of hardscape and landscape.

**Strategy:** Create a year-round calendar of events at the Eden Center square to ensure active use.

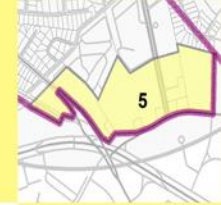


*Top: Chicago Riverwalk; Bottom: ArtsWalk Park Allentown, PA  
Both are examples of how well-designed public spaces combine hardscape and natural elements, allow people freedom of choice and movement, and can be a place to congregate or rest and reflect alone.*





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### Pocket Park

These are opportunistic parks which transform underutilized space into an active green public realm. Such parks are often found in the footprint of demolished structures, in the spaces between buildings, alleyways, and on block corners.

**Strategy:** Plan and design for intentional pocket parks during future East End development.

### Parklet

Parklets are curb extensions which provide additional space for streetscape amenities and people to use them. Usually occupying on-street parking, they are flush to the curb and are the width of a parking space. These spaces are most often filled with seating and vegetation but may house a variety of activities.

**Strategy:** Work with future developers to design parklets along typical sidewalks

**Strategy:** Any future street parking should anticipate possible reduction for potential parklets.



*Example of parklets making the best of space regardless of size, from expanded street medians to parking spaces.*



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### Public Art

Public art contributes to an area's sense of place and identity, sparks imagination, and tells a story. Public art offers the ability to humanize the built environment, blending into streetscape and infrastructure projects. This area is included in the City's formally recognized Arts & Cultural District, which identifies areas in the City where public art should be incorporated.

Public art can take the form of murals, sculptures, and temporary art. Mural festivals similar to the NOMA BID's PowWow! should be explored to kick start the public art efforts in the East End. Creative urban design concepts such as artful Playscapes, bike racks, and crosswalk art, offer the opportunity to create a functional use with public art as reinvestments are made in the area. The existing Fairfax Water Tower in the East End could act as a canvas for a vibrant mural. Opportunities to enhance the East End through the implementation of public art are limitless.

**Action:** Host a week long mural festival to paint and curate murals throughout the East End.

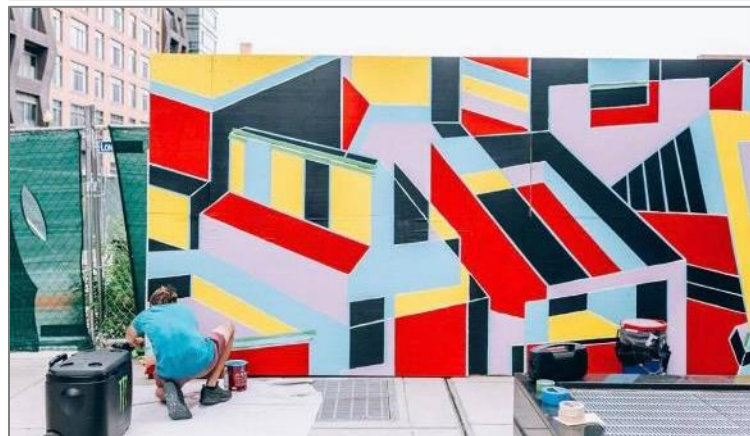
**Action:** Implement crosswalk art where appropriate.

**Action:** Implement artful areas children to play.

**Strategy:** Work with Fairfax Water to integrate art on the side of the water tower.

**Strategy:** Work with Eden Center to create temporary art to celebrate Vietnamese holidays.

**Strategy:** As reinvestments are made in the East End, encourage development teams to invest in public art within project sites.



*Top: Colorful Crosswalk Art.*

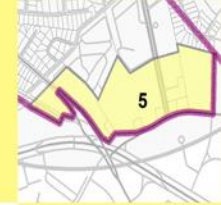
*Middle: Mural Festival in NOMA.*

*Bottom: New York Avenue Sculptures by artist Niki de Saint Phalle.*





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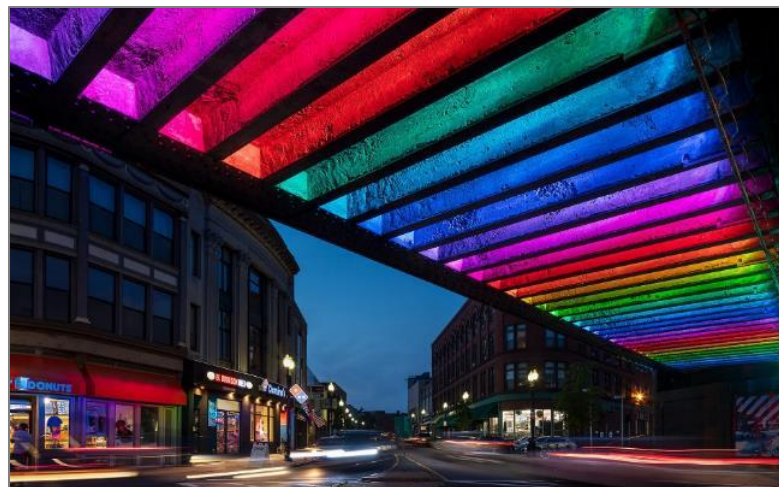
### Creative Placemaking

The National Endowment for the Arts defines creative placemaking as a practice that integrates arts, culture, and design activities into efforts that strengthen communities. One way creative placemaking can strengthen communities is by “bringing new attention to or elevate key community assets and issues, voices of residents, local history, or cultural infrastructure.” A key goal of this plan is to preserve and strengthen Eden Center, a key way to do this all while telling the stories of the rich culture and historic ties of Eden Center is through creative placemaking. Through the animation of public space and the curiosity sparked in residents and visitors alike, creative placemaking offers the potential to rejuvenate an area.

**Strategy:** Activation of the East End Town Center in Node 1 through creative placemaking efforts which include but are not limited to – festivals, artisan markets, musical performances, and the provision of gallery spaces.

**Strategy:** Activate underused public spaces by introducing creative placemaking aspects such as a combination of public art and curated experiences into the physical landscape.

**Strategy:** Explore the stories of the rich culture and historic ties of Eden Center through creative placemaking.



Top: Creative Placemaking in Lynn, MA;  
Bottom: Creative Placemaking at Fairmont Park Conservancy in Philadelphia, PA.



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### Honoring History Through Design

Redevelopment of the East End provides an opportunity to incorporate elements of which reflect the unique history of the area. Fred Foote African American history and the current Asian American history celebrated by the Eden Center's restaurants, shopping, and annual cultural events. The aforementioned elements; gateway features, wayfinding, placemaking, and architecture, are all tools which can be used to make history visible through urban design in the following ways.

**Action:** Utilize wayfinding signage to inform of area's history.

**Action:** Have relevant Eden Center signage in Vietnamese.

**Strategy:** Commission public art which showcases Asian American cultural themes.

**Strategy:** Integrate placemaking into the streetscape which showcases Asian culture through interactive public spaces, public art, food stands & markets, choice of vegetation, and amenities & utilities such as lamp poles, bike racks, and decorative manhole covers.

**Strategy:** Future infill redevelopment of the Eden Center property should integrate Asian, particularly Vietnamese, architectural stylings into its design.



Top: Examples of Chinese signage and wayfinding in Chinatowns in San Francisco (top left), and DC (top right).

Bottom: Example of a fusion of American and Chinese architecture – Paul Tak Center, Chinatown, Chicago.